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National Institute on Drug Abuse

A Community Solution

Drug Abuse Treatment

HE 20.8202:

Department of Health and Human Services
Public Health Service
Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration

What is drug abuse treatment?

Treatment is where people go to end drug dependency.

Treatment gives people time to start rebuilding their lives.

Treatment varies from one program to another.

Good treatment is always clearly structured, goal-oriented, and demanding. In return, treatment offers consistent support and help for people on the road to recovery.

Taking the first step is the hardest part of all.

Addicted people may go on denying their drug problems even when their lives are in shambles. So, it often takes serious trouble—with the law, at school, at work, or in the family—for them to make a move towards treatment.

"I was 7 months pregnant when I went into treatment. I prayed to die every morning because I knew when the sun came up that I would have to look for more drugs. I had to give something a try."

Laverne, 29, bank teller, overcame crack addiction through residential treatment. Shown with her daughters Jonique and Monica.

Like Laverne, some addicted people seek treatment on their own—out of exhaustion, fear, disgust, or perhaps just a glimmer of hope that things could be different for them.

A good match between person and program is key to treatment success

Kinds of drug treatment programs

Outpatient Programs

"Treatment for me is attending NA [Narcotics Anonymous] meetings, talking to my counselor, and going to group therapy. Outpatient is the best treatment for me."

Sachiko, 30, legal secretary, overcame heroin addiction.

Outpatient programs provide help for all kinds of substance abuse problems, including alcoholism. Programs like the one Sachiko attends allow people to work or attend school while learning to live drug-free. Some outpatient programs are organized and intense with full-day attendance required 7 days a week; others involve individually scheduled appointments and activities that may take only a few hours a week.

"Heroin was controlling me. Methadone gave me some control over my life. It changed my life altogether. It isn't done just by giving methadone—counselors are available to help you seek a job or get training."

Jim, 41, machinist, overcame heroin addiction with the help of methadone. Shown with his son Jeffrey.

Medications can help certain people recover from lives dominated by drug dependence. Methadone and naltrexone, medications most often administered in outpatient facilities, can be used to treat people who have been addicted to heroin. These medications, which help eliminate the craving for heroin, allow patients to devote their energy to their recovery, their families, and their jobs. Researchers are also looking for medications to treat cocaine addiction.

Inpatient Programs

"I was relieved to be in an environment where I would not have the slightest chance to engage in the chemically abusive behavior I had in the past. I knew if I chose the course of continuing to abuse, I was going to die. So it really was a life and death choice for me."

Charles, 42, Senior Assistant County Attorney and Vietnam veteran, overcame addiction to Percodan (a prescription drug).

Inpatient programs usually last from 3 to 5 weeks and are offered by many hospitals as well as specialized treatment facilities. This option is suitable for people who need or want uninterrupted time to deal with their substance abuse problems and to establish firm footing for healthy new lifestyles. Inpatient programs offer a full range of therapeutic services and activities. Some programs also provide aftercare services to help people reenter the community and to prevent relapse.

Residential Programs

These highly structured programs, which last from several months to a year or more, are for people whose lives have been seriously disrupted by substance abuse. Many of these programs function much like families: they help people learn, or relearn, the basics of responsible daily living—from completing household chores to treating others decently. Privileges are earned as progress is made. All residents follow a strict round of activities, including work assignments and therapeutic services. This structure helps them develop a new sense of order and discipline. After going through the program, residents are helped to make a phased transition to life in the outside world.

"I needed to go away to a residential program because then I could see myself and the person I am away from the drug."

Nancy, 17, overcame addiction to heroin and other drugs.

Drug treatment takes hard work, but with help from friends, family, and the community...

People can get off drugs and stay off drugs. Drug treatment works:

It helps drug abusers

"I always thought I could do it by myself—I'll quit tomorrow or I'll quit next time. I realized I couldn't do it alone."

Andre, 32, overcame crack cocaine and alcohol addictions through residential treatment.

"I never had peers saying, 'you shouldn't go get high,' but now it's totally different. You come in here and your peers are pressuring you not to get high. It's a whole different way of living and a whole different way of coping."

Kim, 17, college-bound, overcame crystal methadrine and cocaine addictions.

It helps families

"We need therapy just like Nancy does. We're learning things about how to cope with this problem and why she turned to drugs. We're learning that you have to have fun together. I don't think we did enough of that before."

Frank and Rose Martinez with their daughter Nancy.

It helps the community

"A community is not a healthy community unless it has a variety of drug treatment programs available for those who are seeking help. It's cost-effective, and it's the right thing to do."

Randy Johnson, County Commissioner, Hennepin County, Minnesota

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Programs can differ greatly, but certain elements are basic to good drug treatment

Elements of treatment

Detoxification: Detoxification is the process of getting drugs out of the system—of getting "clean." Some people need medical help and psychological support to go through "detox."

Assessment: No two drug abusers are alike either in their drug histories or their related problems. So, at the start of the treatment process, these aspects of the client's life need to be evaluated to determine the best course of treatment.

At assessment, the client's substance abuse behaviors are reviewed, as are current and previous medical and psychological conditions. Other factors, such as family relations and job history, are also explored.

Treatment Plan: Information gathered during assessment helps program staff work with incoming clients to develop an appropriate treatment plan. The plan is like a contract—it spells out treatment objectives, the recommended therapeutic services, and other activities. The plan includes the client's responsibilities, the program's responsibilities, and how progress will be measured.

Therapeutic Activities and Services: Treatment programs often address all parts of a person's life that have been disrupted by drugs:

Clients diagnosed with drug-related health and nutritional problems receive **medical care.**

Psychological services help clients look at the patterns of their drug abuse. In **individual therapy,** they look at the underlying causes of their addiction. In **group therapy,** among other recovering people, clients are encouraged to confront their destructive behaviors and to explore new ways of dealing with people, with emotions, and with the craving for drugs. **Family counseling** helps family members understand and participate in the recovery process.

Essential to recovery is learning how to spend leisure time. Through planned **recreational activities** and **volunteer services** clients are introduced to drug-free ways of enjoying themselves and contributing to the community.

Programs may provide services to meet specific clients' needs: **classroom instruction** for high school students, remedial reading and math for clients who lack **basic skills, job training** for unemployed or underemployed adults, and assistance in finding **housing** for clients without a home.

Aftercare/Extended Care: Aftercare is critical for a successful return to the community. It helps people continue to apply the lessons learned in treatment to their own lives.

Before clients leave treatment, they are usually introduced to outside peer support groups like Narcotics Anonymous (NA) or Cocaine Anonymous (CA), which function like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). These groups contribute to aftercare by allowing clients to maintain relationships with other recovering people who can help them stay drug-free. In addition, for some time after their graduation, recovering people may return to the therapeutic program for regular group and individual counseling sessions. These aftercare services help people avoid relapse.

Families should also be prepared to deal with the transition. Aftercare services can guide families in planning for the recovering individual's return home, train them to recognize and respond to the first signs of relapse, and help them in connecting with support groups for relatives and friends of people with substance abuse problems.

"Aftercare helps you look at what could make you relapse—what could set you up to repeat the same patterns over and over."

Etoy Wilson, drug abuse treatment counselor.

You can help. Make drug treatment a priority in your community.

To find out more about drug abuse treatment, call:

The National Institute on Drug Abuse's Toll-Free Treatment Information and Referral Hotline, 1-800-662-HELP

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